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HEADLINE: **TERRIBLE TRUTH OF KIBUYE MASSACRES**

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HIGHLIGHT:

Lindsey Hilsum talks to the men who stood, machetes in hand, watching as thousands of Tutsis were slaughtered. Now they live with the memory and the fear of retribution.

BODY:

FEW TRACES remain of the Tutsis killed in Kibuye. Their blood has long since been scrubbed from the stone floor of the parish church, which looms over the town from its wooded promontory above Lake Kivu in southwest Rwanda. The thousands hacked and beaten to death in the football stadium - now a French army vehicle centre - were buried behind a wall months ago.

But the men with uneasy consciences have not wiped away the memory of how they stood, machetes and clubs in hand, watching the slaughter - passive participants in massacre.

'We were forced to move with the killers in order not to be killed,' said Evode Micomyiza, one of Rwanda's majority Hutu people and headmaster of a private school in Kibuye. 'They said we should kill Tutsis. Those who didn't agree were threatened.'

Micomyiza was standing outside his house on the April afternoon when the mob poured down the hill to attack the stadium, where more than 7,000 Tutsis - many of them children - had gathered, believing they would be safe.

'They said you must come with us, so I had to take up a club. My precaution was to keep behind the killers because if you were in front, they said: "Kill this one and this one",' said Micomyiza.

There was not enough time to kill everyone in the stadium that day, so the gang appointed guards to prevent the remaining Tutsis from escaping overnight. Those still trapped in the stadium were finished off the following morning.

French officers, who came to Kibuye two months after the massacres, believe 90 per cent of the 60,000 Tutsis in the Kibuye region were killed. Their inquiries suggest that half the male Hutu population there participated in the massacres.

The issue facing United Nations human rights investigators trying to piece together what happened in Rwanda is to distinguish those who orchestrated the killings from those who were forced to join in. They must create a hierarchy of guilt in a country where few people disobey orders and many condemn the killings in one sentence while justifying them in the next.

In the Kibuye region, now in the French protection zone, more than 15 per cent of the population was Tutsi, and inter-marriage was common. People tell stories of Hutu men who sheltered Tutsi friends in their houses but, to satisfy the killing gangs, murdered other Tutsis elsewhere. There are those who killed Tutsi friends to protect their own Tutsi wives. Some are said to have killed their Tutsi wives by poison, or buried them alive, to spare them a more horrible death.

Then there are others, described as thugs or criminals, who were easily persuaded to slaughter their neighbours.

The persecution of Tutsis started in the hills around Kibuye a few days after the Rwandan President was killed when his plane was shot down on 6 April. 'The authorities here received orders from Kigali to eliminate physically the Tutsis,' said Celestin Semanza, who was assistant mayor of the rural area of Mabanza, east of Kibuye.

The mostly Tutsi rebel army, the Rwandan Patriotic Front, was by this time advancing towards the capital.

Gangs of Hutu militia known as Interahamwe, which had been formed and armed by the late president's political party, arrived north of Kibuye. They went from house to house, murdering Tutsis and threatening Hutus who refused to join the killing.

By 13 April, the killing had spread to the town of Kibuye, on the shores of the lake. 'Every morning we woke up to hear whistling and drumbeats,' said Bernard Nduziye, an ordained pastor of the Lutheran church.

The Interahamwe, their faces and genitals covered with banana fronds, were moving around the suburbs flushing out those who did not want to join in the killing spree. Nduziye was hiding three children of a Tutsi friend when a gang of about 20 men arrived.

'They clubbed the little boy to death in front of me. He was seven. They said I had hidden the children of the RPF, so I was an RPF supporter. Afterwards they forced me to follow them.'

The prefect of Kibuye, Clement Kayishema, the region's most senior civil servant, gathered 4,000 Tutsis in the parish church and more than 7,000 in the stadium, ostensibly to protect them.

No one now in Kibuye remembers the date clearly but, over two days around 17 April, all the Tutsis in the church and all except the few who escaped the stadium were massacred by gangs of about 500 men.

Those who watched - or, as they put it, passively participated - say the

leaders were men from outside Kibuye. Dozens of locals were by then in vans, brandishing machetes and clubs.

The prefect of Kibuye fled to Zaire when the RPF took power in Kigali in mid-July. His name is on the list of those the RPF wants to be tried for genocide.

A complex question lies behind the issue of who is the most guilty and who was not brave enough to remain completely innocent. How was it possible that so many men took up machetes against women and children, many of whom were friends? Why did they not run away or resist?

'It's a question I ask myself but I do not have the answer,' said Ndutiye. 'Sometimes I think God has abandoned Rwanda and allowed the devil to enter the souls of the people.'

In the authoritarian society built up by the Hutu government since the Tutsi aristocracy was overthrown at independence, obedience was the key to control. When the leaders said work, the people worked. In April, they were told to kill, and they killed.

Now they live with the fear that the Tutsis will take their revenge.

Those who say they did not kill but joined the mobs, live with divided consciences. 'To condemn the entire population is not just,' said Ndutiye. 'But my conscience is still troubled because innocent people were killed.'